

3 JULY 1980

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SOVIET MILITARY OBITUARIES SINCE THE AFGHAN INTERVENTION

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FBIS FOREIGN BROADCAST
INFORMATION SERVICE

Special Memorandum

SOVIET MILITARY OBITUARIES SINCE THE AFGHAN INTERVENTION

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3 JULY 1980
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SOVIET MILITARY OBITUARIES SINCE THE AFGHAN INTERVENTION

An examination of the obituaries published in the Soviet military newspaper RED STAR during the period December 1979 - May 1980 shows no anomalies that can be ascribed to combat-related casualties resulting from the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. RED STAR's practices with respect to these obituaries--routine limits on the number published, the relatively high military ranks of the deceased, and the paucity of information provided about the officers and the causes of death--rule out the use of death notices to gauge the extent of losses in Afghanistan. Adherence to these practices squares with Moscow's policy of avoiding any indication in its media that the Soviet military force in Afghanistan is playing a major combat role or suffering casualties.

PUBLICATION PRACTICES

The RED STAR study showed that the Soviet obituary format effectively precludes the release of significant information on military losses:

- + RED STAR traditionally publishes only one obituary per issue, although it sometimes prints both a signed obituary for an important officer or official and an unsigned obituary for a less important officer or official. This artificial constraint has continued to be observed since the intervention in Afghanistan. Hence the number of death notices published cannot be taken as an indication of the number of deaths.
- + About three-fourths of the obituaries are for officers no longer on active duty.
- + Only officers of the rank of colonel (or equivalent) and above are accorded obituaries in RED STAR. Lower ranking officers who would be more likely to be engaged in combat are thereby excluded. During the six-month period under review, less than 40 percent of the military obituaries were for officers below the rank of general or admiral.
- + Obituaries never give the place or date of death.
- + Several formulas are used to describe the cause of death--including "sudden death" and "death on duty"--but there appears to be no significant correlation between the formula used and the deceased officer's involvement in the Afghanistan intervention. Only three of the obituaries since the intervention have specified that the death occurred during the performance of military service duties.

The table on the following pages summarizes information derived from an examination of RED STAR obituaries published during the periods December 1978 - May 1979 and December 1979 - May 1980.

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COMPARATIVE REVIEW

	Total		Active Duty		Reserve		Retired		Civilians	
	1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980
December	27	25	6	3	1	2	18	18	2	2
January	25	23	6	7	1	0	18	16	0	0
February	17	25	8	8	4	2	5	14	0	1
March	21	26	3	8	2	5	15	12	1	1
April	24	25	5	6	3	1	15	17	1	1
May	21	21	5	2	4	4	12	14	0	1
TOTALS	135	145	33	34	15	14	83	91	4	6

NOTE -- The time periods for each pair of columns are
December 1978 - May 1979 and December 1979 - May 1980.

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OF PUBLISHED OBITUARIES

Sudden		On Duty Sudden		Tragic		On Duty Tragic		Untimely	
1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980	1979	1980
1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
4	1	0	1 ^a	0	0	0	0	0	2
2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1 ^b	1	0
1	1	0	1 ^c	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	6	1 ^d	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	13	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	2

Died while performing service duties

- a. (RED STAR, 12 February 1980, p. 4) Col. SPIRIN, A.F., chief of an R&D laboratory, Kubyshev Military Engineering Academy
- b. (RED STAR, 14 March 1980, p. 3) Lt. Gen. KOSTENKO, N.I., chief of the Political Directorate and member of the Military Council of the North Caucasus Military District
- c. (RED STAR, 2 April 1980, p. 4) Col. LEBEDEV, Yu.N., senior inspector in the Ministry of Defense
- d. (RED STAR, 11 May 1979, p. 4) Engr. Col. VALUYEV, A.I., no affiliation given

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